

Reflections on War

Many required to prevent a nuclear war that needs only one to start.

By Frank G. Splitt
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The book *Breakthrough: Emerging New Thinking* was published in 1988 at the behest of the Beyond War Foundation.¹ In the book, Soviet and Western scholars issued a challenge to build a world beyond war. Many admired the Foundation's efforts to address the challenge, but warned that no matter how many converts were made to the cause of enduring peace in the world, it could take only one person to trigger a war. How right they were. In August 1990, Iraqi Dictator Saddam Hussein was the "one" who led an invasion of Kuwait.

Years later came related commentary from the late Samuel Hynes, a WWII Marine fighter pilot, who went on to become a world renowned professor of English literature. He resonated with Plato's circa 370 BC admonition: *Only the dead have seen the end of war* with his anti-thematic comments introducing Episode Seven, "A World Without War," in Ken Burns' 2006 film *The War*. The essence of Hynes' comments: The world contains evil, no evil no war; there will always be plenty of evil and there will always be wars because humans are aggressive beings.

"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing" is a popular phrase warning against complacency in the face of evil: Today's "one" is Russian President Vladimir Putin who is waging an aggressive, asymmetric, and immoral war against the people of Ukraine. On the other hand, Pope Francis is a good man, but he seems reluctant to call Putin an aggressor—claiming NATO's barking at the door of Russia may have led to the invasion of Ukraine.²

A negotiated peace that results in Russia gaining Ukraine's entire eastern region could be seen as payoff for Russia's aggression, coerced by Putin's repeated threats of nuclear war. That would surely upend post-WWII world order—the price to be paid by the West for its cavalier, often times provocative if not condescending, post-cold war relationship with Russia.³ A practical view would see this as an opportunity for a do-over based on the Ukraine learning experience. More importantly, it would also provide motivation to avert the chance of widespread nuclear devastation. What to do?^{4, 5}

If Putin does not accept mediated peace negotiations, the Pope can then speak clearly about Putin's nuclear blackmail and his murderous war against Ukraine and its civilian population—countering Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill's claim that God is on

Russia's side.⁶ The Pope's statement could also provide an incentive for the U.N.'s General Assembly to do whatever it takes to either remove the veto power from members of its Security Council or reorganize with its original main purpose of maintaining international peace and security, but structured in way to prevent deadlock by a member state armed with a nuclear arsenal.

Apparently, Putin is determined to annex Ukraine's entire Donbas region as he did its Crimean region while Ukraine's government insists that it will cede no part of its pre-2014 territory to Russia—leading to a seemingly unresolvable impasse. Letting emotion govern the West's actions would be a recipe for disaster. Rather, a practical approach based on logic and reality should be the West's order of the day if its best efforts to constrain Russia's aggression are limited to an impasse. A negotiated settlement should not only ensure Ukraine's survival as a sovereign nation, but should also avoid the flaws of the 2014-2015 Minsk agreements with its related weak Western leadership.^{7, 9} Both provided Putin with a clear pathway and motivation for further aggression.

Reasonable actions could possibly persuade Ukraine to accept a negotiated settlement without complete restoration of its pre-2014 territory. Here are a few such actions that can be expanded if need be: A fast track for entering the European Union, a binding security guarantee from willing nations of all its borders including that of a substantial un-ceded land bridge to the Black Sea, and a reconstruction program similar to the post-WW II Marshall plan with major contributions from America.

Finally, consideration should be given to the possibility that Putin may out of desperation break the nuclear taboo.⁷ In anticipation of this potential reality, the U.S. National Security Council should bolster its competence by taking full advantage of the deep experience, strategic thinking, and different perspectives of former Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates⁹ and former Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger.¹⁰ Their wisdom, coupled with that of still others, could be representative of the "many" required to stop the war in Ukraine—leading to deterrence of a potential nuclear holocaust

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